

# Practice Management

## Hire Now To Better Manage Future Practice Growth

Thomas Lecoq

Do you plan to grow your practice? See-saw-like growth patterns are very common occurrences in those who practice developmental/functional optometry and optometric vision therapy. After all, there are so many more potential patients than doctors available to diagnosis and treat these patients, that a little effort on your part could produce more patients than your office could possibly manage. And that may be a problem. Paying attention only to increasing patient load ignores the predicament of how you're going take care of those new patients and keep the effort to grow alive.

If you fail to plan on either end, your patient load will quickly fall back to a less appropriate level. The problem is that your staff, after a few up/down cycles, will be less than enthusiastic about starting yet another up/down sequence.

All of this puts new meaning to the three words that started this article. Plan to grow. Are you just hoping to

grow and then do something within the practice to adequately handle this growth? That's not a plan; it's an empty hope. If you want to grow, you have to commit to handling the growth BEFORE it happens. To show how you should commit to growth, let's take a look at a few simple statistics.

In a typical optometric vision therapy office setting, a full time therapist can realistically handle approximately 30 patient hours of therapy per week. Some may do more, others less depending upon their skill level. Thus, if you are at the common way station of about 30 VT visits per week, you should plan to hire one new therapist (at the very least) in order to handle double that patient load. Since minimal training takes 6 to 8 weeks, you have to hire and train that therapist before you start the growth effort.

If you're making the transition from 60 to 90 VT pt. visits per week, you'll have to hire and train an optometric vision therapy administrator (OVTA) to maintain your office community outreach and internal marketing communications when everyone else is too busy to do so.

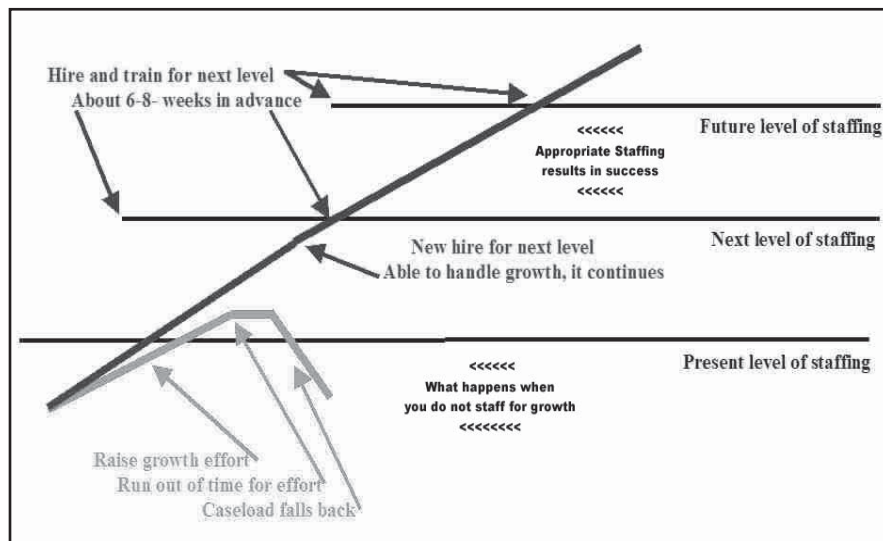
Committing to the development and maintenance of high patient care growth is serious business. If you ignore having an excellent OVTA to bring the office to that level, you will end up with wildly gyrating caseloads and spending many doctor hours fretting over problems of organization and forgotten details.

This growth chart below will help clarify the process.

In order to have an appropriate number of staff to execute your growth strategies AND manage the caseload, you must hire in advance

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so you have staff and procedures in place to keep the pace of growth manageable.

The bottom portion of the chart shows what happens when you do not staff upward for growth. When you make the effort, growth happens. When you're too busy to maintain the effort, case loads decrease. To break this cycle, you should start by hiring the staff you need to succeed and to keep growth a manageable priority. The top portion of the chart shows how adequate staffing leads to greater success and less office turmoil. Each higher level of growth requires a different staffing level and mix of positions. Don't forget that if your office offers primary care, that that area will also grow and may need more staffing as well.

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